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Original
Work

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Novel
Writer

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Target in the *Finder*

TARGET IN THE FINDER NOVELIZATION

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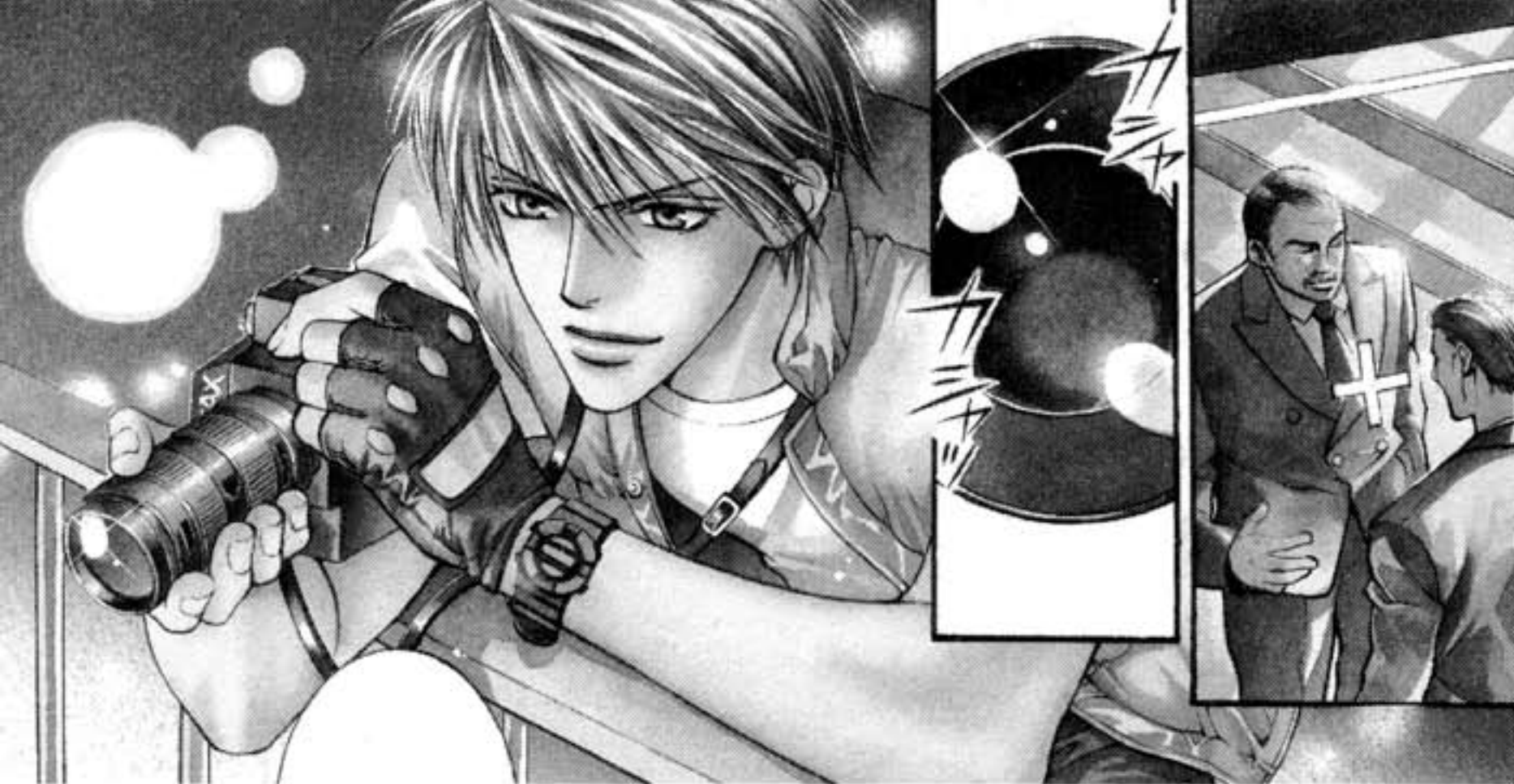
PUBLISHED IN B-BOY PHOENIX #4
SEIKANTAI TOKUSHU (EROGENOUS ZONE COLLECTION)

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
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SPECIAL THANKS TO
SUNFLOWER1343 & PAUNAKAN_JEN
FOR ADDITIONAL PROOFREADING



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A spectrum of color dances into the view of the world cut into a rectangle. As he slowly adjusts the focus, the sharp nightscape overflowing with neon signs appears in the viewfinder.

Shinjuku – one of the world’s most prominent downtown cityscapes.

Lust, hatred, confrontation, prosperity, exploitation, desire, insanity, dominance... Possibly every single character trait found in humans is encompassed within this city, which holds an endless and crazed celebration night after night. The flashy and repetitive strobe lights of the neon signs, the glowing trails of tail lights, and the lights of the storefronts never dim throughout the night. There is the gaudy and indecent glow lighting up the city from within, and the surrounding shadows become even darker for it. Within that swirl of darkness, there are those who hide from the light of day secretly and at times boldly do their business in the underworld.

In one part of this darkness, on the roof of an apartment house that was squeezed into a space between other buildings, Takaba Akihito stood with camera in hand and in light gear.

If his sources were correct, the target should be showing up very soon.

The roof that Akihito stood on was seven stories aboveground. Just a glance up gave him a full panoramic view of the high-rises in West Shinjuku. Around here, there were many stores that indulged people in every possible luxury of adult entertainment, and as expected the sound of music leaked out of each one of those in the area surrounding the train station.

Information relating to drug deals was often false; and even if the information was real, it was fairly common for a change or cancellation right before the transaction, leading to a lot of wasted time, but...

...There he is.

His heart thumped in his chest.

A high-end members-only club, Sion, rated as top-class even within Japan. At its doors a highly-polished luxury Toyota Century pulled up.

Looks like it’s about time for him to leave.

Just as he thought, the doors to Sion quickly opened and several men appeared. A well-built middle-aged man in a two-piece suit was being given a formal send off by the staff. It was Harada – the secretary of a bigwig member of the Diet for the Opposition Party.

Though the features of the shadowy figure were visible to the naked eye, he used his camera zoom lens to reconfirm. The person seen through the viewfinder fit perfectly with the profile of Harada, which he had memorized.

There’s no mistake. It’s really him.

Shifting his view, he focused on the men laughing with Harada. A big smile crossed his face. One of the men was the manager of Sion... and the other...

How lucky of me to have you show up too...

The third man was a well-known drug dealer, Nakaoka. Rumor was that most of the drugs making their way into Shinjuku from Taiwan were through Nakaoka.

From Akihito's angle, it was difficult to get a good shot of Nakaoka's face, but since the drug dealer had shown up, there would be no point if Akihito wasn't able to get Nakaoka's face in the picture with the rest of them. If he were allowed to be a bit greedy, the ideal would be to get all three of them including the manager, in one single shot. Resting his elbows on the rusted fence, Akihito patiently waited for the best time.

...gotcha!

Along with the light sound of the shutter, his beloved Pentax Analog lens captured the defining moment as Harada shook hands with Nakaoka. And between them, with his hand resting on their handshake, was the manager of Sion.

"All right!"

There was no better proof than this picture that a manager of a high-end club mediated a meeting between the secretary of a member of the Diet and a drug dealer. Akihito calculated that if he could take this to the media, at the very least he'd get enough payment to cover several months of rent. Last month he'd sent another camera in for repairs, so he was broke.

A secret meeting between the secretary of a big-shot member of the Diet and a drug dealer.

Akihito grinned at the thought of such a headline accompanying a full page spread of his photograph. There were several important people from other fields who frequented Sion. With this scoop as the trigger, Harada and Sion could be the start of a huge incident that could shake both the government and financial circles.

With an overwhelming sense of euphoria, Akihito continued to click his shutter until the Century carrying Harada disappeared into the night.

~ * ~

"Please excuse me, Asami-sama."

The heavy oak doors opened and the voice of the diffident secretary echoed in the darkened room.

The wall and ceilings were covered with a calming natural wood, and the lights highlighted the tasteful environment. Before the floor-to-ceiling windows stood a wide and luxurious desk. Matching the mahogany cabinets, the immense desk was a prominent feature.

Standing to one side of the desk, the man called Asami continued to stare through the window at the city below his feet and didn't turn. The features of the face mirrored in the glass did not often go unnoticed, and the strands of hair lightly falling over his forehead framed the perfectly chiseled jaw line. The well-toned body was wrapped in an Italian-made three-piece suit not often suited for Japanese men, and exuded a powerful grace. At first glance, he seemed like a young executive, but the cold glow in his eyes made people shrink back into themselves. The sharp atmosphere that surrounded him clearly differentiated him from those who did honest business.

"There was a message from the Akasaka store. The U.S. military officer we reported on before showed up again. Just like the last time, he reserved a bottle with the same pseudonym."

"...Just keep an eye on him a little longer. We may be able to get an even bigger one through him," Asami answered, a Dunhill in hand. The appearance of this man as he stared down at the city as if to assess each of the lights, embodied the organization. To gain the absolute control and following of someone no matter how small a strength, was how Asami's organization had made a name for itself in the Japanese underworld.

"In regard to the 'scoop' photograph incident at Sion, we were able to get to the publishers and put a stop to the publication, but it looks like the police are sniffing around the area. Apparently Harada, the secretary of the member of the Diet, was already marked by the police. The one who mediated the meeting between Harada and the drug dealer was the manager of Sion and the incident was his own doing."

"We still have some use for Harada. Make an appointment with the member of the Diet. I will personally meet him. The drug dealer...Nakaoka... get a hold of him too. I'll settle everything before the Taiwan organization really gets involved."

"What should we do with the manager?" The secretary asked for further instructions with a strictly businesslike tone.

"We've no choice but to replace anyone who falls so easily for dirty money. I'll leave the cleanup to you."

The baritone that drifted from the lips holding the cigarette was sexy and beautiful, yet unfeeling and cold. There were several reasons why Asami's organization had been able to rise to the top so quickly, but the main reason was the speed and accuracy of the decisions made by the leader, Asami, and the utter ruthlessness. Knowing that, the secretary made no effort to question him any further.

"Understood."

Bowing slightly to his master, who continued to stare out the window, the secretary quickly exited the room.

Dropping ash into a fine Baccarat crystal ashtray, Asami glanced down at several photographs scattered on his desk.

The subject in the photographs was all the same.

...still young... it wouldn't be surprising if he were still a student....

For a Japanese man, his hair color was light. The bangs framed the boyish features while the almond-shaped eyes portrayed a stubborn nature.

"Takaba Akihito... A young, talented freelance cameraman... He's got a good eye, but there's no way I can let him off after muddying my name."

Blowing his cigarette smoke, Asami's lips drifted into a cold smile.

"Looks like a little punishment is in order..."



Akihito grunted as his body was smacked against a wall.

“Wh...what the hell’s with you guys?! What do you think you’re doing...?!”

With his arms gripped tightly behind his back, Akihito was unable to move his upper body. His cheek was pressed firmly against the rough concrete, and while he tried his best to fight back with a swift kick backwards, there was no contact.

Some men in black suits held Akihito down. When he’d realized he was being tailed by them, Akihito had thought he could easily lose them. But despite their well-groomed appearance, the men were well-trained in teamwork. And they knew the terrain of this city much more than Akihito. Before he knew it, he’d been cornered in an alley and the only escape route was the backdoor of a rusty old building. After jumping into the building, he’d realized why the door had been unlocked. The men had set a trap for him.

“Are you Takaba Akihito...?”

Akihito shivered, then froze as a smooth baritone voice resounded from behind him. Even without seeing the speaker, Akihito knew just by sensing his presence, his absolute existence...

The bitter scent of cigarettes surrounded them.

“So you’re the one who captured those shots of the secretary of the member of the Diet at Club Sion...”

The tone of his voice wasn’t strong... one could even say it was almost gentle. Yet, the depth of the voice made Akihito’s hair stand on end.

He’s got to be the boss...

Akihito tried in vain to twist his body around, but the grip on his arms didn’t weaken.

“Wh... who are you...?!”

Akihito managed to turn his head slightly but the baritone must have given a command, because suddenly he was made to turn around. Facing the owner of the voice and meeting his gaze, Akihito gasped.

“...!!”

A few inches above him was a face with deeply chiseled features: straight nose and thick lips, and moreover, icy eyes that stared down at Akihito.

“Thanks to your ‘scoop’, I had quite a big loss in my business. I wanted to ask you something.”

“Wh... what...?! That photo ended up not being used, right? It got vetoed!”

The story that Akihito had caught on film had been bought quickly – and for a very good price. But later on, the article had never appeared, so Akihito had contacted the paper and been told by the editor who’d bought the photograph that the story had been dumped.

And now, here was this man...

“...let go of me!”

Is he the leader of the drug smugglers? Or a hit man hired by the member of the Diet? No... he’s nothing as simple as that... this guy is seriously dangerous.

Pretending to struggle, Akihito checked out his surroundings. But the man must have read his movements because he loomed over him with one hand on the wall, blocking Akihito’s view.

“Don’t be so frightened. All you have to do is answer me honestly. I just want to know who leaked the information to you. Won’t you tell me?”

“I... I don’t know. What do you plan on doing, finding that out from me...?!”

Akihito's response was cut short with a swift knee to the chest by one of the men in black. Keeling over in pain, a condescending voice fell upon him.

"A brat like you will only get hurt if you underestimate us. If you're going to stick your neck into this world, you'd better be aware of your surroundings."

Through his coughing fit, those words struck a nerve in Akihito. Strengthened by his stubbornness and youthful energy, he wanted to snap a comeback. Akihito was good at that, but in this situation real strength was needed more than words.

Trying not to be detected, he slowly recovered his breath and replied, "...Owww... I know that...already!!"

Aiming at the bespectacled man who had kicked him, he kicked with his right leg and connected with the man's back leg. As the man fell, his grip on Akihito loosened. Breaking free from the man's hold, Akihito sprinted away from them and headed down the alley.

"Hey...!!"

Angry voices followed, but he wasn't stupid enough to stop. Akihito frantically sought a way out.

Staring at the youth's running figure from behind, the boss, Asami, couldn't help but smile amusedly.

"That brat... He must be stupid, running towards the back. There are only stairs leading up that way," muttered one of his men as they began to chase after the boy. The man who'd been kicked quickly followed.

Unable to find a way out, Akihito continued upward.

Asami, without losing his breath, calmly reached the top of the stairs. The empty rooftop was illuminated by several neon signs in the area and was much brighter than the inside of the building.

Akihito, who was plastered against the ledge facing the main road, turned and made a sour face as Asami and his men arrived at the rooftop.

"You have no way out, kid," Asami said as he slowly approached the boy.

What will this young target's expression be...?



There was no moment more enjoyable than gazing upon the face of a target when it surrendered. At times that look was one of defeat, while other times it was resignation or bitter resolution.

Wanting to see that expression up close, Asami inched closer. But Akihito, who had been stubbornly staring out to the other side of the ledge, turned with a determined look on his face.

“This is still better than when I was chased by an old yakuza.” Illuminated by the glow of neon signs, Akihito flashed a fearless smile.

Suspicious of that smile, Asami moved even closer, and the next moment Akihito jumped over the ledge and disappeared behind the other side of the neon sign.

“What the...?!”

“He jumped...?!”

The men all mumbled in shock. The rooftop was at least five stories aboveground. The building might be old and each floor wasn’t that tall, but a jump from that height could mean instant death. Even with luck, a major injury couldn’t be avoided.

Asami approached the barrier and peered down. “...!”

Clinging to the side of a neon sign sticking out from the side of the building was Akihito. With the weight of the youth, the weak old sign was creaking.

Trying to find his footing, Akihito sensed Asami’s gaze and childishly stuck his tongue out at him. The sound of metal groaning under weight echoed in the air, and Akihito’s expression froze.

“Eeek!” The sound had echoed below and several people passing by screamed at the scene above, causing more people around to notice.

Asami, taking care not to be seen by the people below, quietly stepped away from the edge.

“....Hmph.” Without realizing it, a slight smile and laugh escaped his lips. “What the hell. Did you see that...?”

“Y, yessir.... To jump from this height....” But Asami’s men were more surprised at the fact that Asami was laughing than at Akihito’s daring stunt.

To think that I would let prey get away...

Asami didn’t even try to suppress the sense of excitement growing in him and instead relinquished himself to it.





“...it’s not the action of a sane person...”

Lighting another cigarette, Asami continued to stand there for a while enjoying the feeling of amusement... a feeling he hadn’t had in a long time.

~ * ~

“Geez, you’ve gotta be kidding me!” Akihito fumed as he slumped in the lounge chair.

Purposely waving his right pinky – bandaged in an exaggerated way – he turned to the man sitting beside him.
“I sprained my pinky when I fell! Hey, Yama-san, who the hell is that guy?!”

“As always, you’re way too rash...” Yamazaki mumbled, cigarette in mouth, turning the pages of a newspaper with a sigh of incredulity.

“The man you met is most likely Asami. He’s the owner of Sion, the place you scooped the other day. That store just got raided after all.”

Shinjuku Police Department, the break room on the fifth floor.

Yamazaki was an officer in the Organized Crime Control Division. Before Akihito followed the path to becoming a photographer, Yamazaki, who was in the Young Offenders Division at the time, guided him. Contrary to his rough-hewn face, Yamazaki was someone who really took good care of others, and as he cared for Akihito, they became old friends. Even now, as Akihito settled into a goal-oriented path, he visited the department and secretly exchanged news from the streets for any kind of information that he could make a profit from.

For a rookie photographer, there was no way that Akihito could make a living off of mere city news reporting. Even though he accepted any job that pertained to photography, he had often been saved from eviction by the information passed on to him by Yamazaki.

“I got chased around, had my stomach kicked in — I went through hell!”

“That’s why I told you straight from the beginning that it was information related to some dangerous drug incidents.”

“Then that Asami guy is also in the drug business?”

“Yeah...the guys in the Living Section were all excited about it...”

Yamazaki glanced at the hallway. In Yamazaki's old haunt, which was the City Safety Department, there was the Youth Team as well as the Drug Investigation Team. Along with the Anti-Organized Crime Team, they were all there on the fifth floor.

Asami....

The city of Shinjuku, though not very large, had somehow become a lawless territory, thanks to the disorder caused by the power of multinational criminal organizations. The explosive amount of money exchanged in drug transactions made drug trafficking the belle of the underground business world. Even Akihito was aware that Shinjuku had the highest rate of drug trafficking in the country.

The past few years, the coexistence and confrontation in relation to the drug market had been changing drastically. Drugs made in China were smuggled in by Russians, and then sold in the city by Indonesians. Finally, Japanese gangs raked in the profits – such methods of complex circulation were not that unusual.

If one seller was arrested then the other sellers increase their activity; if an executive member of a group was arrested, then another member was promoted and the position taken over.

The job of investigating drug activity was much like grabbing the tail of a lizard, so even if the rate of crimes solved was high it wasn't like the act of drug trafficking was going to get reduced. Still, the City Safety Section of the Shinjuku Police Department continued to do its endless investigations in order to lessen the crimes even a little.

"Well, it's not like they'd do anything serious to a kid like you..." Yamazaki pulled the ashtray closer and tapped off his ashes before he continued.

"But you really need to be cautious about that Asami. On the outside, he's the owner of several high-class clubs, but his status in the underworld is limitless and there are rumors that he's involved in drug trafficking as well. In the case of Sion, the investigation was discontinued so apparently he's able to pull strings with the higher-ups. He's dangerous," Yamazaki explained with a nonchalant tone as his eyes darted across the newspaper, but Akihito couldn't help but feel a cold shiver down his spine.

It was hard to tell with his appearance, but Yamazaki was considered one of the most cool, collected, and logical thinkers among the rough Organized Crime Department and despite his boorish face, he was tight-lipped. The information he passed onto Akihito was about situations that weren't too important to the police but were more sensational to news headlines. Akihito also knew that Yamazaki passed the information to him only after careful consideration.

Knowing that and hearing Yamazaki's warning means this was very serious.

"Whoa... he's that great...?"

The image of Asami's cold eyes was burned into the back of Akihito's mind.

There's no doubt that guy is dangerous.

With a forced smile, Akihito held his camera - the cool, hard, and familiar weight in his hands. It wasn't the latest model and it wasn't top of the line. Still, for Akihito, who was pursuing the path of a photojournalist, the camera was an important partner.

"But if I give up after something as little as this, I can't live off journalism. An older cameraman once told me that I won't become a good photographer by just doing what everyone else does."

Few people knew it, but Akihito had a great dream. One day, he wanted to be one of the members of "Magnum Photo" – a famous world-wide group of photojournalists whose impressive works came from around the globe.

Akihito's father was a photographer, and the skill of holding a camera and taking photos had been engrained in him since he was a small child. During his junior high and high school years, he hadn't been a stand-up student and he'd often taken off with his father's prized cameras. All this because he'd known and enjoyed the fact that even the simplest snapshot could be taken with far greater quality than with any disposable camera. Before he knew it, he'd been making his own money doing small photography jobs and giving himself to the pains of perfecting his skill.

He'd become an apprentice to a cameraman introduced to him by his father and around the time he was skilled enough to do work on his own, he'd been taken to a gallery showing of "Magnum Photo" by his senpai.

Monochrome photos of children after the war, images of war occurring on the other side of the world, photos of athletes from unknown countries with arms raised in victory — each and every picture marked Akihito, changed him and sent shivers down his body.

.... One day, I want to take photos like that.

Such thoughts became the source of his energy, and Akihito began to actively pursue stories. There were war journalists in Magnum Photo. There was no way he could be a photojournalist if he were frightened off after a mere knee in the stomach.

"...You're really burning to do this...? That's quite the progress for a delinquent who's been to juvie 5 times."

Akihito glared at Yamazaki, but the redness in his ears made it all too obvious that he was embarrassed.

~ * ~

2 AM.

Asami was at one of his several homes located in the city. Today, he returned to a seafront high-rise condo he'd acquired for its easy access to the airport. The realtor had boasted about the pool, fitness room, restaurant and bar lounge among other luxurious amenities, but Asami had been more interested in the 24-hour room service, cleaning, full security parking and other hotel-like systems.

After taking a hot shower, he poured whiskey into an old-fashioned glass filled with large ice cubes. Dressed in a bathrobe, he took a call from his secretary.

Both the west and south side of the condo had floor-to-ceiling windows and at one glance one could see the grand nightscape of the bay area. Asami enjoyed looking at this view. Turning down the lights, he settled into a reclining chair and listened to the reports as his eyes wandered over to the Bay Bridge.

As the profit rates of his stores were read off, he noted that the new manager of Sion seemed to be doing good work. Then listening carefully to other reports requiring his decisions, Asami gave a few instructions.

Completing most of his report, the secretary changed the subject and said "In regard to that situation... After further investigation, it looks like that news leak the other day was the work of some organization that's after our area. Apparently the main purpose of that exposé wasn't to get the Member of the Diet, but to crush us."

The previous manager of Sion had disappeared after realizing that his traitorous acts had been detected. It had appeared that he'd been preparing to run off, but when Asami's men finally tracked him down, he'd committed suicide. It was unknown whether this act was in fear of the consequences of his betrayal or to silence himself before he was tortured for information.

However, Asami didn't believe that the former manager had the guts to betray the organization just for his own greed, and had a feeling that there was another force that was pulling the strings. The problem was, who was it and how were they planning on stealing Asami's profit?

"Is it 'The Kajiyama Group'?" The name Asami spoke was an old organization within Shinjuku. In the battle for the rights to the drug trafficking market, they'd fallen behind Asami's organization and the boss, Kajiyama, was rumored to view Asami as his enemy.

"And about that kid, he seems to be known to an Organized Crime Department officer named Yamazaki. It's believed that the information we spoke of before was leaked to the police."

Asami's hand froze in midair as he reached for his glass.

That young photographer...

Asami responded to that report with minimum feedback – find out the direction of the Kajiyama Group's warring faction and find out who had been passing information to the police. After giving his instructions, Asami hung up the phone and took another sip of whiskey.

A chess piece dancing upon the chessboard...

Rolling the bitter taste and fragrance around in his mouth, that phrase passed through his mind. Tilting the glass, Asami stared at the light from the nightscape reflecting off of the amber-colored liquid. He continued to play with that thought in his mind.

Trapping prey that was so full of energy was something that Asami found deeply satisfying. However, that cameraman – regardless of the fact that he'd fallen so easily into his trap – had shown he had even more defiance in him; and he'd been able to free himself with such an unexpected move. His actions surprised Asami, something new that he hadn't felt when hunting his usual prey. Even now when he closed his eyes, he could recall that fresh memory of the young man's body dancing in the sea of neon lights.

It's the kind of excitement felt when hunting wild animals...

Most likely, his prey lacked the knowledge of how the underworld worked. Those who had even the slightest knowledge of Asami would have either frozen in fear at the moment they were trapped by him or given up on escaping – from past experiences, those were the only two actions taken. Not to mention that the whole idea of going after a scoop involving politicians meant he really had guts or was extremely stupid.

Regardless, there was no doubt that the young man had the potential to show him a really good time.

"How amusing. I suppose I'll play with the boy a little more." Satisfied with that idea, Asami quietly emptied his glass.

~ * ~

As usual, Yamazaki was the one who passed him the information that a big drug deal was going to take place that night at the container warehouse at the pier. After sneaking onto the premises while there was still daylight, Akihito searched around for a spot where he could see the entrance. Finding a perfect spot on the emergency staircase of the pier management company building, Akihito waited several hours for the moment to capture the act on film.



As midnight approached Akihito began to give up, thinking that the information was a dud, when finally a shadow appeared at the entrance of the warehouse.

It's him...!

Peering through the zoom lens of his camera, the finder captured the image of a man still fresh in his mind – Asami. Just as Akihito thought “This story is huge!” the Asami he saw through his finder looked straight up at him and smiled.

!!

Normally, there was no way someone could detect Akihito, who was hidden in the shadows five stories above ground.

I've been duped...!

He quickly took his eyes from the camera, but Akihito's face was covered by a hand that loomed out from behind him. A wet towel was pressed against his face and beyond that he couldn't remember.



~ * ~

He heard the splashing of water. He felt it trailing down from the back of his head, down his cheeks. Akihito came to his senses from the cold of the liquid and the tickling feeling of droplets.

“Uh....”

Like a bad hangover, his head felt heavy. Not fully awake, he opened his eyes but they only captured a blurred image of droplets as they fell to the carpet-covered floor.

“Are you awake, Takaba Akihito?”

Raising his head to the sound of a familiar baritone, Akihito's gaze fell upon a whiskey glass, water dripping from its edge. It seemed someone had poured water over his head. Then finally, Akihito noticed the cold stare.

“A...Asami...” Surprised, Akihito tried to pull back... and heard the sound of chains clanking.

“!!”



Finally realizing the position he was in, Akihito's eyes widened. He was stripped naked, and several leather straps encircled his body.

"Wh... what the hell..? Hey...!" Both legs were bent so that each ankle was tied to a thigh. A rope hanging from the ceiling and attached to the chains around his legs ensured that his legs were kept wide open. Akihito's wrists were also tied to the ceiling and he was unable to move. What astonished Akihito the most was his penis left bare in the open and the leather belt tied tightly around it.

"Wh... what the hell is going on?!"

Panicked, Akihito tried to struggle but it merely caused the chains to rattle. The ropes around his arms and legs only swung around and showed no signs of coming apart.

Where the hell is this place?!

Staring around frantically, Akihito caught sight of Asami, who was leisurely leaning against a desk, puffing out smoke from his cigarette.

"I just thought I'd do what you wanted."

Placing the cigarette back in his mouth, Asami pressed a hand on Akihito's leg and pushed him down face-up on the desk. His penis fell back onto his ripped abs and the hidden spot between his ass cheeks was revealed.

Staring down at the bud, Asami narrowed his eyes in satisfaction.

"It's quite the view."

Redness crept up in Akihito's cheeks.

"Wh... why are you doing this...?! I... I'm a guy...! Don't look...!!"

The two times prior that he'd seen Asami, the man had always dressed impeccably in a three-piece suit. But now he'd rolled up the sleeves of his pressed shirt, loosened his collar and tie and had an overall casual appearance. The overpowering feeling he possessed to suppress and control those around him was still there though, and his eyes had an air of confidence in them much like that of a predator that had captured its prey.

That stare further stirred up feelings of shame.

"Dammit!"

Akihito put all of his strength into the glare he gave Asami, but his best shot at being tough faltered with the quiver in his voice, and that truth shook him from within.

I'm a man... yet... I'm...!

As if he could read Akihito's inner thoughts, Asami's eyes trailed slowly down the young man's body. The small hairs on Akihito's body rose up in shame.

"Grh...!"

"You're frightened. You have a good expression... You wanted to know about me, didn't you? I'll tell you just like you wanted. Slowly, from this moment..."

A knowing smile crept up on Asami's lips as he reached out with his hand and clamped it over Akihito's mouth.

"Nngh!"

Instinctively, Akihito shook his head and tried to free himself from that hand, but it gripped his lower jaw so tightly that it was impossible. Suddenly, a small bottle was lifted before him and shaken as if to focus his attention on it.

"Nn... Nn...!!"

With a snap, the lid was opened and a tantalizing scent of volatilizing alcohol mixed with a bold lily fragrance tickled his nostrils.

Wh... What the...?! This.. scent...

I shouldn't breathe it in.

His instincts warned him. But his body, closed at the mouth, yearned for oxygen and finally could not resist taking in a deep breath.

The stimulation instantly reached his brain, and by way of his bloodstream it thundered throughout his body. Within his core, an obscene heat lit up and sweet pains arose all over the place.

"Haa...h...!"

His heart pounded with a large thump.

"How is it...?"



Akihito's body twitched slightly as Asami peered at him. The hand clamped over his mouth moved away and instead a finger parted his lips. His lungs, now free to take in more oxygen, sucked in deeply - not knowing that that very move would cause the aphrodisiac's effect to deepen.

After watching Akihito's reaction from start to finish, Asami closed the lid on the bottle with a satisfied smile.

"Wh... what's this smell...?"

"You'll feel good soon enough."

With a hint of amusement in his voice, Asami leaned in close and licked Akihito's ear.

"...!!"

With a wet sound and the hot breath directly in his ear, a shiver raced through Akihito's body. His heartbeat quickened and his cheeks and ears flushed.

What the...? All of a sudden, my heart....

Asami traced his tongue along the base of Akihito's ear, and he followed with a light nibble on his earlobe.

"Hah...unn..."

Akihito felt a sweet numbing sensation in his lower abdomen as more shivers sped up his spine. He never even noticed that his thoughts of trying to get out of this situation were disappearing. All of his attention was focused on the many places in his body that were yearning with desire, and soon his heart was pounding loudly in his chest.

"Ah... wh-what... s-something's weird... I...!"

He felt an obscene sense of release, as if his body had turned into a mass of heat that was slowly melting away, and a perverse sensation of several hands groping and fondling the surface of his body. A wave of joy that demanded more and more heat crept up between his legs as Akihito twitched his hips.

"What's this? You're already hard here...?"

"Eee..!!"

Akihito quickly raised his hips as the base of his cock was grasped.

"Uhaa...!"

Akihito couldn't help but call out with a voice laced with desire. His shaft and the balls beneath it were slowly caressed, and he found himself sensitively reacting even to that tickling stimulation. A bit of nectar began to trickle out from the tip.

"Aa... no..."

"So perverted," Asami murmured, slightly surprised and amused at how charming Akihito's sigh was. Creating a ring with his fingers, he gripped a little tighter.

"Ha..ah..!"

The rhythm of Asami's rubbing quickened, and an obscene squishing noise soon began. Each of Asami's fingers made different movements, and stimulated all the different areas.

"St...stop! D-don't touch.. me...!"

...Weird... I've gone all... weird...!

"You've never been teased here, have you? I'll make you feel all of it."

Asami's thumb began to poke at Akihito's tip, making more wet noises from the nectar trickling out.

“...! S...stop...”

Akihito's lips were barely able to create a word in protest; his voice was almost a mere panting. Already given much pleasure, Akihito's penis grew even harder with a thick vein pressing to the surface.

“Nn! ...Nn...nn...!”

As Asami continued to caress the young man's tip, his other hand began to rub the underside of the shaft, causing Akihito to almost lose consciousness from the pleasurable sensation.

“Hey. Don't come yet,” Asami whispered to him teasingly, and stopped rubbing.

...ah... n...no...

His senses in a daze from the effects of the drug, Akihito inwardly wished for the pleasure to continue. And when Asami's hand once again encircled his penis, he entrusted his senses to the pleasures brought on by the man's movements....

“Aaa...!!”

...Asami thrust a catheter into the tip of Akihito's penis. The intense sensation of a foreign body there sent sparks across his vision, and a moment later his mind exploded into white nothingness.

“Aaaaaah...!!”

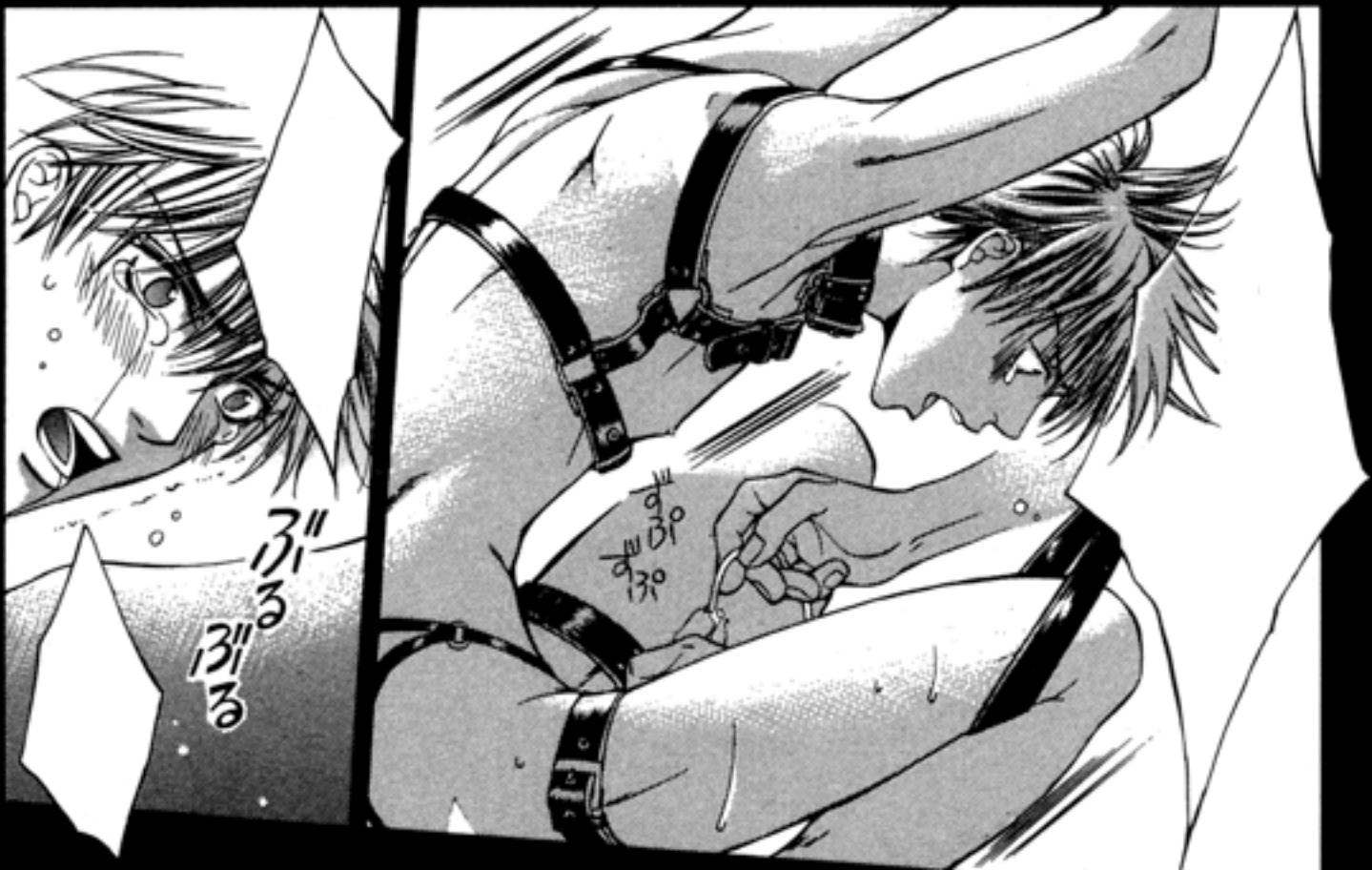
The pain made Akihito spasm violently, his whole body shaking as he screamed with his eyes wide open. The whole time Asami kept pushing the tube down his urethra and Akihito tried desperately to free himself from the pain and discomfort by doubling forward.

“Uh..aa...aaa!!”

The impact – as if his penis was split in two – coupled with the unknown sensation brought on from the pain made Akihito tremble endlessly. He was short of breath and raw sounds came forth endlessly from his throat.

“Urgh...Aa..uh...!”

“What, crying already? I'm just about to give you even more pleasure.”



Asami said with a smile as Akihito continued to shake, and he bent down and licked the catheterized tip.

“Nn..!”

The thick tongue lapped at the liquid seeping out from between the penis and the tube. As Asami’s tongue caressed Akihito’s penis, a sensation other than pain began to slowly return.

“Aa...! S... stop it...!”

“Hey... Giving up already? What happened to the all the energy you had when you jumped that ledge?” Asami chuckled.

He’s laughing as he sees me in pain...

Akihito grit his teeth and suppressed the groan in his throat. He bore the pain caused by the man’s tongue and twisted his hips, pulling back to escape. But the very action made his penis waver in a come-hither way, exciting Asami even more.

“Nnah....aaagh...!”

“You make really good expressions...”

Asami slowly passed his tongue over the tip and head as he continued to stare into Akihito’s eyes. In turn, that beast-like, silencing stare made Akihito cower back.

“...Aa!”

Even as Akihito reacted to each stimulation, he couldn’t take his eyes off Asami.

“You’re really cute. When I see an honest guy with an attitude like you, I can’t help but to want to tease you...”

Akihito saw the dark joy laced in the man’s eyes and began to tremble.

This guy... is planning something really bad...

Asami felt the goose bumps creeping up on Akihito’s skin and grabbed the young man’s penis – the catheter still poking out of it.

“Ee..!!” Akihito yelped from the pain and pleasure. “Uhaahaaah...!!”

He felt the thin string of saliva dribbling down from the side of his lips but he could not hold back the scream. No one can deal with the fear of having such a sensitive spot be gripped so tightly as if to crush it.

“No!! Aaah!! S-stop it...!”

“I see. Then, how about this?” The catheter slowly moved to the left and right.

“Aah! No...hurts.. it hurts! Urgh... st...op it! Aaah!”

No longer able to determine whether the action was causing pain or pleasure, Akihito cried out like a child. His ragged breath shook his cheeks, and his heels banged loudly against the desk. Tears streamed down endlessly from his unfocused eyes, and his bangs stuck to his forehead from the sweat.

Akihito yelled, pleaded and swore...and finally panted, “Aaahn... pl-please...no...”

Asami’s thumb rubbed Akihito’s lips as he continued to whimper. He pressed his fingers against the lips wet with saliva and opened the young man’s mouth, pushing in a ball gag in the process. With an accustomed hand, the strap was tightened.

“Stay quiet until you start to feel good.” Asami’s hand parted from his penis and Akihito was freed from the pain. The catheter remained deep inside, but compared to the pain of being gripped so tightly, it was bearable. Akihito inhaled deeply through his nose to steady his breathing as the scent of leather spread through his nostrils. But when he saw what Asami held in his hands next, his eyes widened and he weakly shook his head.

It was a thick silicone vibrator with numerous bumps along its surface. Even with his mind in a daze, Akihito knew that its size was beyond normal.

“Nn! Nnnn!!”

Asami used the tip of the vibrator to scoop up Akihito’s precum then pressed it against his secret spot.

Shit...! Is he for real...?!

“Let me see you take it in... all of it.”

The cold hard foreign object began to wiggle slowly inwards. Akihito imagined what would be done to him with that object and instantly went white.

No... that’s...!

The tip was pressed against his secret spot to moisten it and soon, wet noises were heard from the narrow opening. Akihito put strength into his body in reaction to the uncomfortable sensation, but Asami threw one of the young man’s legs over his shoulder and twisted the vibrator further inside him.

“Nnngh...! Nnnf!!”

Akihito screamed into the ball gag from the new sensations bearing down on him. As the object twisted from left to right, it dug further into him. His inner thighs twitched violently and his penis went numb from the pain as Akihito put more strength into his body.

All the while, Asami watched him with an amused smile and as he stared down at him, his hand went to the switch.

Vrrrrrrr, vrrrrrrrrrr.

“Nnn! Urgh! Nnngh!” The vibrator began to quiver as the tip of it twisted around. His body unable to keep up with such strong sensations, Akihito unconsciously bent his knees and tried to grab at the vibrator with his heels. But Asami calmly stopped him from doing so and slowly pulled out the vibrator almost to its tips before placing the other end of it upon the desk.

The vibrator continued to rattle against the desk and as Akihito listened to that unnerving sound, he couldn’t help but whimper at the feeling of the object as it stirred the opening of his hole.

“Nn...uhh...nnf...” The only action Akihito was left with the freedom to do was to glare at Asami with tearful eyes. If he moved, intense stimulation would follow; however, as long as he remained still, there was no great pain. Still, he was shaken by a sensation that was different from pain as it surfaced here and there and he couldn’t help but curl his toes.



Asami watched his reactions and just as Akihito's breathing began to settle he once again reached for the vibrator.

"Nnn!! Nn!!" With the object pushed deep inside him, it rubbed at his core. Next, in a twisting motion it was pulled out almost all the way before it was pushed back in with one swift move.

"Uuu...Nnnf...Nngh!" The complex piston action was repeated and Akihito couldn't help but pull his head back and writhe. Every bump on the vibrator rubbed his insides and stirred him - pain and pleasure shot up his spine to his brain in an explosion of sensations. His erect penis twitched and wavered, causing the catheter to swing back and forth. The pain and pleasure mixed to the point that Akihito could no longer keep his breath steady.

Succumbing to the stimulation caused by Asami's hand, he no longer had the ability to fight back....

* flash * * flash *

Akihito blinked at the strong light that flared up close. The sound of the camera shutter, well-engrained into Akihito's body, made him regain his senses. The strobe of light flashed once again and Akihito finally came to his full senses and opened his eyes wide.

"This camera... you're taking good care of it, right? It looks like it's in good condition."

Asami played with the mode dial before flashing Akihito once again. Anger towards Asami began to creep up once again – not just for being tricked and the shame of having pictures of himself in such a compromising position, but more for the fact that his prized camera was being handled so carelessly. His clouded mind began to clear from the anger.

Dammit... Bastard... with MY camera...!

In an attempt to avoid shots of his face and body, Akihito pulled up his knees to his chest and rounded his back. But the pressure caused him to squeeze the vibrator inside him, and the sweet vibrations against his sweet spot made him whimper.

"Ah...nn..."

"While I'm at it... You wanted a scoop, right? Why don't I send these pictures to your regular publisher?" Asami said with amusement, annoying Akihito, who turned away in defiance. Perhaps seeing the consciousness return to the young man's eyes, Asami released the ball gag. Ignoring the string of saliva trailing from his mouth to the gag, Akihito tried to yell at the man before him, but as he tried to put strength in his gut, the feeling of the vibrator and catheter inside him did not allow it.

"Ha....."

The sound of film being wound was heard and Akihito instinctively raised his head to the noise.

"Do you want it back? The film?"

"Give... it back...! It's no use to you anyway, right?"

With a click the film finished winding. Asami took the film out of the camera and for a moment, rolled it between his fingers as if considering something.

"....That's true... Then I'll give it back to you." A smile appeared on Asami's lips.

Before Akihito could think what it could mean, a hand reached forward and quickly pulled out the vibrator. An unbecoming cry escaped his lips as the rough action made him feel like his insides were being pulled out. A split second later a weight was felt on his knees and he was pushed back on the desk. The obvious rough handling made the fear in his heart return.

"S-stop it...!"

Yet Akihito only felt fear until he realized, with eyes wide open, that Asami still held the film in his hand.

"What the...?!"

Fingers pried his hole open and a moment later he felt the cold hard touch of an inorganic object.

“What are you doing...?! No...!”

Akihito twisted his body recklessly, but Asami’s upper body held his knees in place. Contrary to his desire to get away, his opening was loosened up well from the vibrator and easily swallowed the film roll deep inside. “Aa! ...urgh... Nnnaaah...!” Akihito moaned deeply with a restrained voice. While a vibrator was bigger and far more painful, the object made of soft silicone was a much different feeling.

“...you swallowed it. Want to try another...?”

Embarrassingly, the film roll easily slipped inside as Asami pushed it further in with his finger.

“Aa... Nnn....nnn...”

He could feel his engorged penis growing. The leather cut into his base, making it twitch back even more.

The clear liquid dripping out from the end of the catheter left small circles upon the desk. Seeing this, Akihito could not help himself and bent forward.

“Th... this is too cruel... this... this...”

The voice raised in criticism unconsciously came out as a tearful cry, which triggered something to change in his heart. The shame and chagrin of being made into a plaything made heat gather in his eyes, and tears, not of pain or reason, but tears filled with an emotion of a different kind, rolled down his cheeks.

Asami gripped the young man’s chin and raised his head while staring at the change in his expression.

“Yes... that’s the face.”

Akihito’s lip trembled. Not wanting the man before him to see the tears falling from his eyes, he tried to turn away but Asami’s large hands would not allow it.

“Uh...urgh.. damn... it...!”

“...Heh. You really are cute. I’ll let you down easy now.”

Asami pulled Akihito’s head closer and forcefully kissed him. The first thing Akihito sensed was the taste of cigarettes. The lips pressed hard, and the kiss deepened. Without release, his bottom lip was sucked on and a tongue slipped forward through the slight opening and slid along the top of his mouth.



“Nnn...”

The long tongue slowly licked the inside of Akihito’s mouth, and as his tongue became repeatedly entwined with Asami’s, his reasoning began to drift away once again. His body trembled with fear and tension yet as his tongue was sucked on and hot breath blown into his mouth, for some reason he felt a slight warmth in this act. Akihito’s consciousness slowly drifted into the feeling of pleasure and he whimpered slightly.

“Mmn...mph... ah...aaaaah!!”

Suddenly one end of the leather band was tugged, and the noose tightened around his base. With a slip, the band rubbed against his penis, the pleasure borne from the friction sent jolts up his spine causing him to raise his hips slightly.

“Nn!! Ah... haa...”

His body trembling, his opening relaxed and the wet film slipped out and fell to the floor with a “clack.” Akihito’s penis, seeking release, twitched as Asami’s hand gripped his base in place of the leather band. Dazed, Akihito felt relief at the disappearance of the foreign object in his body, but also felt a slight sense of dissatisfaction, a feeling he wished to deny.

“Did you like it? ...To be teased from behind?”

“Aaah...!”

Asami’s finger parted his hole and groped his insides. His finger burrowed further and further inside until it found Akihito’s pleasure spot.

“Hya!”

If it wasn’t for Asami’s grip, Akihito would have ejaculated right there.

The pleasure borne from having his prostate gland stimulated through tissue was surprisingly intense, and he felt as if he would be swept up in the wave of pleasure spreading through his body from the movements of Asami’s finger.

“Aaa...! Aan.... Nnn!”

“How is it? It feels good here, doesn’t it?”

Stimulated with the scratch-like motion, Akihito raised a lusty voice through lewd pants. His penis, engorged as if on the verge of exploding, continued to twitch.

This is a lie... this is... not... me...!

His consciousness wavering in and out from the extremely pleasurable sensations, Akihito’s insides squeezed down. As if to spread open that pressure, Asami’s fingers moved left to right, persistently teasing the membrane. A liquid, too thick to be precum, began to flow from the opening of his penis through the catheter tube.

“Come. I will hold you.”

Asami holding him, Akihito’s opening was pushed open with the man’s fingers. As a hot mass entered, Akihito screamed once again.

“Aaah!!”

His body jolted back from the intense shock and he was made to sit on Asami’s lap as the man slipped an arm around his waist. Asami’s cock twisted into him as if to pry him open.

“...Ah...ah!”

Each time his hips were pressed down, his opening sent shocks of pain to his brain. Asami’s size was way beyond his imagination and his body tensed in fear at the thought of being ripped apart.

“Urh...uhh...owww...!!”

The pain was too much. When Asami entered him hard, Akihito's penis began to wilt.

“...h...ugh...uh....!”

Asami continued to thrust into Akihito even as tears formed in his eyes and his breath became short and rapid.

“Ow...! No... take it... out...!”

Yet, even such pain lasted only a moment, and as Asami lightly shook his hips, the inside walls that only sensed pain gradually began to change. Asami's core rubbed deep against his prostate gland. Asami grasped Akihito's hips and slowly began to grind, spreading a lustful numbness throughout him.

“See...? Deep inside...”

“Nna... uhh...!”

As if satisfied by the painful moans, Asami whispered into Akihito's ear and slowly pulled out, pausing for a moment before slamming back into his hips again.

“No...!”

Grasping his hips, Asami put Akihito on all fours and didn't hold back. The desk rattled from the intense movement.

“Aah...! Ah! Aah...!”

Akihito's insides twisted as if to devour the heat. As he was shaken by the hot mass, a slight pleasure began to spread and grow within him. Before he realized it, Akihito was overtaken by an immense stream of pleasure.

“Uh....ah..! So...deep... A.. Asami!”

Akihito unconsciously called the man's name, and the cock thrusting deep inside grew larger, spreading him even more. Asami's hand reached around to Akihito's penis and rubbed the tip, which still had the catheter poking out of it. As Asami stroked Akihito's cock, it gradually began to harden again.

“Nn...ah...!”

Pressed from both behind and in front, Akihito completely lost himself and let out an intoxicated scream as his nipples were pinched roughly. Not even realizing it, he raised his hips higher and clamped down, wanting to devour Asami even deeper inside.





"Aah...! Uh... good... so good..."

"For your first time, that's such an obscene reaction..."

The insides being thrust into by Asami seemed to melt from the heat, and his swollen penis engorged painfully.

This... this is... amazing... feels...so.. good...

Even as he moaned, Akihito's hips wavered and were completely captivated by the pleasure brought on by Asami's thrusts.

"A...Asa...mi... I'm... it's so... great... Aaahn..."

"Akihito, don't forget... the pain and pleasure you receive from me."

The movement quickened and soon the sound of bodies slapping against one another could be heard. As he was thrust into and his opening made to make loud wet noises, Akihito's knees began to grind. But the pleasure was so great that he didn't even notice the painful rubbing of his knees against the table, and Akihito continued to scream out loud.

"Nn...aaah... no... I... I can't....I...I'm..."

The rapid stream that boiled to one point below, rose up to the tip of his penis and caused his hips to spasm and shake. As he moaned in frustration, Asami sensed the change in him and pressed Akihito's head to the desk as he quickened his pace.

"Go ahead... let it out."

"....!Aaah...!"

Raising his voice even louder, Akihito's hips trembled as he released a hot stream. Finally allowed release, the catheter was pushed out and several droplets splattered around. And even as Akihito lost consciousness, his body continued to twitch for a while.

~ * ~

A horn sounded across the pier.

A freight ship led by a tugboat entered the small bay as light from the sunset surrounded it, casting long shadows along the warehouses lined along the shore. The sea grew calmer, sending silent waves as dusk settled in, and the only sound heard around was the engine of the tugboat.

---In order to live in this world, you have to become smarter. Otherwise there's no telling when you'll fall into that dark hole again...

Devastated to the marrow in his bone, Akihito – exhausted beyond imagination – had lost consciousness. But upon waking, he'd discovered that his body had been cleaned up and he'd awakened on top of a large springy bed. Sitting on a sofa by the window, Asami had sat with a newspaper spread out – as usual, his expressionless face hiding his inner thoughts – and a cigarette hanging from his lips.

Noticing that Akihito was awake, Asami had ordered him to get dressed as he'd called his man to ready a car. After being blindfolded and stuffed into the car, Akihito had been dropped off at Yasukuni Street. While it wasn't a long distance from there to Shinjuku Station, his joints had screamed with every step due to the long hours of being bound and held in awkward positions. In particular, the throbbing in his lower half had changed to a sudden extreme pain with the slightest awkward movement, so he'd been forced to stop every now and then. With weakening steps, he'd finally managed to reach his apartment and slept like a log for a full day. Because of that, his body had recovered somewhat, but he was far from being fully back to normal.

---Train your eyes to learn to detect the real thing...

It was none other than Asami who had given him that warning. The world that Akihito had been sticking his neck into was a "catch-a-weasel-asleep" kind of harsh place and the moment anyone let down his guard, he'd get his feet swept out from under him from behind and devoured. The way Asami had said it sounded as if he was both admonishing him and looking down on the ignorant Akihito.

And just before he'd released him, Asami had pushed another reality on him.

---This is something someone in my organization looked into...

Listening to Asami's short words, Akihito had been dazed, and quickly denied the man's story in his head. He couldn't believe it. There's no way he could believe it. But even as Akihito had glared at the man, Asami had stood unmoving; and the cold emotionless eyes that had stared back at him had almost made him flinch.

It's a lie. There's no way that could happen.

Even after Akihito was released, he continued to deny Asami's words and pushed them from his thoughts. But the more he thought about it, he was tortured with the dilemma that there were several findings that supported Asami's story. Unlike his usual self, Akihito dwelled, wavered and worried, until at last he came to this point.

The freight ship blasted its horn once again.

"After digging into my ass, you've got a lot of nerve...but...."

Akihito closed his eyes and calmed himself before pushing away from the wall he'd been leaning on and began to walk forward – to find out the truth in Asami's words.

In one of the warehouses soaked in the light at dusk...

Within the dusky interior, a dry elderly voice began to speak in whispers. "Who'd have thought that the information regarding the exchange in this warehouse was a trap set by Asami...."

The Kajiyama Group's second leader, Kajiyama Eizo. His tone was offensive, but there was a slight sense of fear in his voice – one that Kajiyama himself didn't notice.

"If that kid's been taken, then he's probably doped up by now and sold off. But no one better discover our organization because of him..."

"What's to discover? Takaba knows nothing. There's no problem." The voice that answered him was the Shinjuku Police Department's Yamazaki.

"Hey hey, we better be able to trust you. If worse comes to worst, we're the ones in trouble. I've heard that guy Asami has really sharp instincts. Well, in any case it's a good thing we used a kid with no ties to us." Kajiyama's threatening tone hid his fear of Asami.

As Yamazaki studied Kajiyama, his expression changed to one of slight annoyance. "I didn't come here to chew the fat with you. That raid on the market the other day went well, right? Hurry up and give me what you're supposed to and scram."

Tension suddenly filled the air, but Yamazaki's expression didn't waver.

Kajiyama tsk'd his tongue loudly in disdain before turning to one of his men and nodding towards Yamazaki. The man, after being given the signal, reached into his jacket pocket and produced a brown envelope, which he passed silently to Yamazaki.

Yamazaki flipped open the envelope and checked whether the contents were fake before nodding once. Taking that as a signal that the exchange was complete, Kajiyama took his men and disappeared. Yamazaki watched expressionless as the group retreated.

"Who the hell do you think is allowing you to do business here...?"

Hearing such words chilled him to the bone... Akihito closed his eyes with a pained expression.

After the Kajiyama Group retreated, Yamazaki smoked three cigarettes one after the other to kill enough time. Disposing of the smoked cigarette butts into his portable ashtray, he checked the area one last time before walking swiftly away so he wouldn't be suspected on the odd chance that he was seen.

Soon his steps became calmer, before completely stopping. For a moment, Yamazaki stood, hesitating before he turned and made his way toward the Harbor Building. There was only one high-rise around this harbor. The upper floors of this building would have been the ideal place from which to take shots. Sure enough, on the emergency stairway on the third floor he saw a familiar camera bag and cap left on the ground.

Yamazaki lit a new cigarette and stared down at the stuff left on the ground for a moment. His hand slowly reached down for the baseball cap and lifted it up. Suddenly he heard a voice from behind. It was Akihito.

"Oh! That's mine! I'm glad it's still here."

Yamazaki's face froze as he turned to look at Akihito.

"Ta...Takaba... what...happened to you?"

As expected from a seasoned cop, his shock subsided quickly. But because Akihito had known Yamazaki for so long, he knew that the expression the man showed next was his forced "natural expression."

"What do you mean 'what happened'? What about you, Yama-san? What are you doing here?"

It was difficult to look clueless. Seeing the deeply cautious eyes of the man before him, Akihito had to force his cheeks to continue smiling.

"...No...it's just that...I was worried since you disappeared three days ago..."

"...I see. Sorry I worried you. But I'm at least whole so I'm okay."

"...Takaba... Were you taken by Asami...?"

"Yama-san..."

Unable to stand it any longer, Akihito interrupted Yamazaki's question. Yamazaki was the one who'd passed him the information, but it wasn't like Akihito had kept in contact with Yamazaki on a daily basis. Yet, how was he able to determine that it was "three days ago"? On top of that, Akihito had actually only been confined for just over a day, and after his release he had been stumbling around Shinjuku, which was supposed to be under Yamazaki's jurisdiction. Considering he'd said that he'd been "worried about his disappearance," there hadn't been a single message on his cell phone or his phone at home....but...

Yamazaki was his benefactor.

"I...believe in you, Yama-san. I know you must have to hang around those types of people as a part of your job. It can't be helped, right?"

Back then, while living a sheltered life in school, he'd felt that he knew everything about the world and he'd been cocky. Yamazaki had lent his ear to the ramblings of a mere kid and had treated Akihito like a human being – essentially saving Akihito many times with his earnestness.

"I...I won't tell anyone... You've taken care of me since I was a school kid.... And on top of that..."

"I respect you..." Akihito was about to continue as he turned and froze in surprise.

The barrel of a gun was pointing straight at him.

The darkened eyes stared at him. Akihito couldn't move as those eyes continued to bore into him.

"...Takaba...this isn't a child's game. I'm..."

"Ya... Yama-san..."

He didn't know what he was going to say.

But before he could continue, a shot rang out and Akihito felt an impact and fell to the ground.

There was a sound of something metallic hitting the concrete.

Followed by a small grunt of pain.

Akihito's heart raced and echoed throughout his body.

My camera....

The bag that had been slung over his shoulder had also fallen to the ground.

I hope my camera isn't broken.

I hope my lens didn't crack.

As he opened his eyes slightly, in his blurred vision Akihito saw Yamazaki clutching his gun hand, gritting his teeth in pain.

And standing before him was an overwhelming presence.

“Even if you finish him off, the police are all over this.”

Akihito raised his head to the sound of the familiar baritone.

Wh...why....?

Asami stood with a semi-automatic pistol in hand, as if protecting Akihito.

As usual he wore an impeccable three-piece suit and a Dunhill hung from his lips. And with the grip horizontal, Asami held a CZ75.

It was a gun born from the Czech Republic during the old Communist days, and holding it in one hand, Asami was bathed in the glow of the sunset, his hair casting shadows on his chiseled features. Staring up at him, Akihito thought...

I want to take a picture. Now... this moment... this man...

A gentle wind blew the cigarette smoke, and Asami's bangs fluttered. But Asami himself didn't move an inch, and he surpassed everything in sight, utterly ruling it all.

“I'll be handling those guys you were talking to. It's all over now.”

With a distressed expression Yamazaki glared up at Asami, but that was only for a moment. Then, giving up, he fell to his knees.

As Asami helped a dumbstruck Akihito to his feet, two men carrying guns arrived. Seeing the men who were obviously the police, Akihito tried to wrench himself away from Asami. Yamazaki, an officer, was shot and Asami still held the gun.

Yet one of the men nodded at Asami – Asami nodded back – and that was it. One of the men picked up Yamazaki's fallen gun using a handkerchief while the other bent down to check on Yamazaki's wounds.



With an ashen face, Yamazaki stared back at the men with disbelieving eyes. Akihito searched his memories and came to a realization – yes, they were the men from the Shinjuku Life Department.

“It happens a lot, organized crime groups and organized crime department officers joining together.”

Turning around, Akihito saw Asami putting his gun back into his holster.

“Apparently that cop used his position and plotted the raid on the market, and in return he accepted a kickback.”

Tapping his cigarette and dropping some ashes, Asami brought his hand up to cover the lower half of his mouth as he took another drag. Continuing to stare down at Akihito, who in turn looked up at him, he calmly blew out some smoke.

“You were used.”

Akihito glared at hearing the cutting words Asami delivered.

Those were the same words Asami had said to him just as he was being released.

---You're being used. Your cop friend is one who's become tainted by the life of the underworld.

“But, you shot Yama-san. Then of course you'll also...”

“Don't you see?”

Asami threw a glance at the officers. While they didn't restrain Yamazaki, they were keeping watch over him. Asami's attitude was one of complete non-aggression. The meaning was understood.

He understood it too, but Akihito didn't want to acknowledge Asami's power. No... the real thing he didn't want to acknowledge was the cruel reality that he'd been betrayed by someone he'd fully trusted with all of his heart.

“But... even if you have some influence over the police, if Yama-san were to testify that you shot him, that's it.”

Asami stared coldly at Akihito for a moment, but he soon gave an exasperated sigh.

Akihito's eyebrows furrowed as he tried to figure out what that sigh meant. Asami stared back at Akihito with an expression that was clearly mocking him, while reaching into his pocket to pull out a gold lighter and a red box, pulling out another cigarette.

“That cop will be sent to prison.”

The lighter was a classic model roller-type. Asami, in a habitual movement, lifted the lid as a dry “clink” echoed.

“To prison inmates, cops are the enemy. So to have an ex-cop sent in there... Can you imagine what will happen when the inmates around him find out who he is?”

With his free hand cupping the flame, Asami lit his cigarette – that movement, much to Akihito's regret, was very fitting for a scene in a drama movie.

“Even if he's imprisoned while hiding his identity, if he's unlucky he may meet one of the criminals he'd arrested. From that they'd find out he'd been a cop and the prisoners wouldn't be too happy. There'd be those who'd want to lynch him. There's a chance that it could go too far and he could be killed.”

Akihito sucked in his breath. He'd seen something like that in a foreign movie once.

“And your friend knows that no matter which prison he gets sent to, I'll be able to send in an assassin. He won't say a word,” Asami asserted as he turned.

The two officers slowly approached them and Asami began to speak with them in a low tone.

Yamazaki and the Kajiyama Group.

Asami and the officers from the Living Division.

When Yamazaki had spoken to Akihito about Asami, he'd said that "He's able to pull strings with the higher-ups."

In other words, Asami had one up on everyone. But it didn't change the fact the either of them, any of them, spoke of rotten truths. They tricked, they betrayed and they laid traps to climb over each other and rise to the top. That was the unwritten law in this world.

Moments later, a patrol car with its sirens blaring approached and Akihito took this as a sign and retreated. Exiting from the rows of warehouses, his feet carried him toward the ocean. Eyeing the mooring bollards along the dock, he sat down on one of them.

---You were used.

Those emotionless words were repeated in his heart once again, and Akihito bit his lip as it began to tremble. This was different from the physical pain that Asami had given him; this was a pain that twisted and tightened something deep in his chest.

As he stared at the sunset reflected in the water, a mass of emotion he could no longer hold back rose up and tears began to well. His vision blurred and his feelings sank more and more. Tears trickled down from both eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

Just like Asami said, he probably was used by Yamazaki. But at the same time, the reality was that he was indebted to the man for so long and on so many occasions that to Akihito, Yamazaki was an irreplaceable benefactor. There's no way he could hate Yamazaki; all he felt was a great disappointment, and sadness.

"I trusted you.... So cruel..."

Suddenly a large hand patted his head and messed his hair. Surprised, Akihito tried to look up, but as if to hold him down, the large hand continued to mess with his hair and prevented him from lifting his head.

"I don't know if that man really meant to shoot..."

It was the baritone of the man Akihito thought had stayed behind at that warehouse. That voice was unusually hesitant, but the pause was only for a moment. The voice continued soon after.

"...Well, I suppose it's a cruel story for a kid..."

Akihito waved his arms about as he protested with a "what the hell," but he thought perhaps that the man was trying to console him.

However the moment he saw the annoyingly cool, calm face of Asami smoking a cigarette, Akihito – feeling bad that he'd been seen crying – glared and snapped back,

"Well you used me as bait too... And shooting guns off at police officers... How can you stay so calm?!"

No doubt the investigation would also fall on the Kajiyama Group that Yamazaki was doing the exchange with. Using that opportunity, Asami would probably take over the Kajiyama Group's market. With just a slight effort, he not only got rid of his obstacle but was also able to gain their profits. In the end, Akihito and Yamazaki were nothing but pawns in Asami's game – and taking Akihito was nothing more than a little break between incidents.

By now, Akihito was able to figure out that much.

Making a fool of me...

Akihito shot the man a rebellious glare, and it seemed like Asami's mouth – cigarette hanging – rose up slightly at the ends. But before Akihito could determine anything, Asami had turned away; so Akihito shouted at the broad back.

“And it’s not like I feel I owe you anything for what you did back there!”

He couldn’t help but marvel at the fearsome instincts this man had to grasp victory through his plans, or the cool and reserved judgment and the power to influence even the police. But no matter how skilled he was, there was no denying that Asami was a bad man.

“Asami!” Akihito yelled out with all his strength. “I won’t ever forgive a villain like you! One of these days I’m gonna get you and make a profit from it!”

Akihito was prepared to hear the man say the usual “What a brat,” but surprisingly as Asami turned to look back his expression held a very obvious smile.

“I see. I look forward to it.”

Caught off his guard, Akihito blinked back.

Asami mockingly and challengingly retorted, “It might be good, to be seen by you through your viewfinder.”

Bathed in the glow of the sunset, Asami – a smirk on his lips – walked off into the darkness.

Akihito burned that scene into his heart and thought:

This may just be the start of something...

END

